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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the implications of James D. Thompson's generalized model of the organization model for organizational- and institutional-level analysis of the newspaper. The paper focuses on the following points of consideration and how they apply to newspapers: (1) organizations are open systems operating under norms of rationality; (2) the role of rationality and certainty as efforts to seal off the organization's technical core; and (3) access to resources and the flow of these resources through the organizational system. The paper argues that the newspaper industry is increasingly inclined to pursue rational norms and that structural adjustment within the newspaper to facilitate coordination among interdependent parts is inevitable. The paper proposes that this model can also serve as a source of insight and theoretical perspective for studies focusing on occupational groups and individuals in the newspaper organization, or even on the news product itself. Forty-eight references are attached. (KEH)

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THE NEWSPAPER AS OPEN SYSTEM IN PURSUIT OF RATIONAL NORMS

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THE NEWSPAPER AS OPEN SYSTEM IN PURSUIT OF RATIONAL NORMS

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a dozen years since Hirsch (1977) set forth the "organizational perspective" on mass communication. His article represented an attempt to integrate research developments in two areas: the study of news production, represented by a two-decade accumulation of "gatekeeper" studies and newsroom ethnographies; and the burgeoning subfield of sociology known as "cultural production." Arguing against the view that each category of news or entertainment organization is unique, Hirsch proposed to draw on industrial and occupational sociology for insights into how different types of media production were alike. He called on researchers first to identify organizational and occupational similarities across different media, and then to search for characteristics unique to production of symbolic content by comparing news and entertainment production to other types of production.

Hirsch's call has yet to produce a general model of media production; but theories and concepts borrowed from the broader field of organizational studies have become increasingly evident in mass media research. Dimmick and Coit's (1982) review and reordering of mass communicator studies by level of analysis echoes many of Hirsch's concerns in its attention to organizational roles, structure, decision-making, effectiveness, environment, and institutional context. Dimmick and Rothenbuhler (1984) apply the notion of "ecological niche" to a macroscopic study of how new media of communication displace older ones; and Turow (1984, 1985) employs a "resource dependency" approach to explain how media organizations and their representatives respond to environmental pressures for change. Bantz's (1985) study of

conflict as cultural norm in news operations follows work on "organizational culture" and power relationships within organizations. Solomon (1985) takes a neo-Marxist perspective on the occupational implications of new technology in the newsroom, concluding that the introduction of video display terminals has led to "deskilling" of newspaper copy editors.

Each of these studies draws on theories and concepts from organizational or occupational sociology--or theories from other fields that organizational researchers have borrowed--to illuminate an aspect of mass media production. This paper represents another such attempt. Specifically, it examines how a classic of modern organizational theory, Thompson's (1967) model of the organization as an "open system" operating under "norms of rationality," might be used as a framework for research on newspapers. The main purpose is to appraise the theoretical fit of Thompson's generalized model of the organization with the U.S. daily newspaper. A secondary aim is to suggest some specific avenues for research by which Thompson's perspective might help identify both common and unique features of newspaper structure and behavior.

II. THREE STREAMS OF NEWSPAPER STUDIES

Researchers have used a variety of strategies to study the people and organizations who put out the news. Research on the production of newspapers may be categorized by level of analysis into three streams: (1)individual-level studies focusing on journalists' backgrounds, training and attitudes; (2)studies focusing on occupational and organizational routines; and (3)studies of community, societal and institutional influences on

news production. These are reviewed here for illustrative purposes to indicate the variety of phenomena that might be incorporated into an overall organization model.

Belonging to the first category are the early "gatekeeper" studies (White, 1950; Gieber, 1964), which attempted to discern whether editors' individual biases affected news selection; survey research focusing on individual producers of news (Johnstone et al., 1967; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986); and work on journalistic "professionalism" (McLeod and Hawley, 1964; Kimball, 1965; for a review, see Allison, 1986).

The stream of research concerned with the conduct of news production dates from Breed's (1955) study of sources of control in the newsroom. Breed found that publishers' business interests and political inclinations exerted pervasive influence on what news got covered or not covered. Interest in individual owners' idiosyncracies has declined with the decline in number of independent dailies, while occupational and organizational requisites and constraints have come to the fore. Subsequent surveys and ethnographies focused on symbiotic relationships between journalists and sources (Sigel, 1973; Nimmo, 1964); role and power relationships among journalists, editors and managers (Argyris, 1974); and routinization of newswork (Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Whitney and Becker, 1982).

Studies concerned with the societal context of news production exhibit great diversity in terms of both research questions and methodologies. Schudson (1978) and Schiller (1981) have made detailed historical analyses of the social origins of of "objectivity" as a journalistic norm. Dreier (1982) uses an inventory of interlocking directorates to argue that newspaper firms are intimately tied to the U.S. power structure. Numerous

studies have employed content analysis to evaluate the effects of newspaper competition on content; Donohue and Glasser (1978) suggest decline of competition leads to more homogeneity in news; while others (Schweitzer and Goldman, 1975; Weaver and Mullin, 1975; Entman, 1985) find little difference in news quality between newspapers in competitive situations versus those in monopolistic situations.

No single model can encompass everything we know about newspapers from this accumulation of individual, organizational and societal-level studies. However, Thompson's organizational model, which emerged from a large body of empirical research on organizations in other industries, provides a useful integrative framework for studying the dynamics of newspaper production.

Thompson's model is most easily adapted to research at the organizational and institutional levels. It suggests new lines of research on a wide range of intra-organizational phenomena as well as on organizational-environmental relations, and provides a theoretical starting point for analyzing topics as varied as the relationship between newsgathering technology and newsroom organization, the coordination of needs and goals among different newspaper departments (news, advertising, production, and circulation), and the strategies and processes by which the press maintains its public legitimacy.

This study mainly discusses the implications of Thompson-s model for organizational- and institutional-level analysis of the newspaper. However, the model also can serve as a source of insight and theoretical perspective for studies focusing on occupational groups and individuals in the newspaper organization, or even on the news product itself. Some ideas for research at these levels are proposed in the conclusion.

III. THOMPSON'S MODEL OF THE ORGANIZATION

Scott (1987) categorizes the three main perspectives that have shaped the study of organizations since the early 1900s as rational, natural, and open systems views. Rational systems theories conceived of organizations as tools consciously designed to achieve preset goals. Natural systems theories emphasized the importance of human interrelationships and informal structures and norms within the organization. Open systems theories stressed the linkages between organization and environment. Beginning in the late 1950s, theorists began to blend perspectives, and a generation of theories emerged that saw the organization as both rational and open. Thompson's Organizations in Action (1967) represents a major work in this vein.

A. General principles of the model

Thompson's thesis is at once a description of organizational structure and operation and a strategy for studying organizations. His approach to understanding organizations in general seems well-suited to the study of newspapers in particular for several reasons:

First, Thompson views organizations as eclectic rather than uniform in nature. Sub-systems of organizations may operate on varying premises, and open-systems realities are likely to impose many constraints upon rational-systems goals. The newspaper organization likewise is eclectic: It employs several types of technologies, must orchestrate sophisticated coordination among departments, and is embedded in an extremely complicated web of relationships with a diverse and dynamic environment. In many ways, the modern newspaper epitomizes the central paradox of Thompson's approach: It strives to be a closed system subject to "norms of rationality" and employing rational-model criteria for

performance and decision-making; but because in fact it is an open system subject to environmental influences, it must operate according to "open-system logic" (p. 24).

Secondly, Thompson's principles for analyzing both "universals" and "variation" in organizational characteristics and behavior provide a useful framework for examining recent developments in the newspaper industry. Thompson sums up the universal aspect of complex organizations as the problem of coping with uncertainty. "The tighter the norms of rationality, the more energy the organization will devote to moving toward certainty" (p. 159). From the firing, hiring and restructuring that follow media purchases, one could infer that the growth of corporate dominance over media in the modern era has tightened the norms of rationality, with important implications for the structure and functioning of these organizations.

As for variation, Thompson holds that categorical distinctions among organizations (e.g., business, government, education) do not explain significant differences. Rather, variable aspects stem from differences in technologies and in "task environments," or those parts of the environment that are most relevant to an organization. In the case of newspapers, many particulars of organizational structure and behavior are related to the nature of technologies and elements of the environment.

B. Key concepts of the model

Turning to specifics, Thompson identifies three levels of responsibility and control within the organization--technical, managerial, and institutional--as well as the environment of the

organization as key arenas of study. His analysis focuses on the interactions among the three levels, as well as on the interactions between each level and the environment.

The technical level of the organization is oriented around "the nature of the technical task," e.g., the materials to be processed and the kinds of coordination required to get the job done.

The managerial level both services and controls the technical level, mediating between the technical level and the environment and determining how the technical level should operate.

The institutional level refers to the organization's relationship with the broader social system which supplies the organization with meaning, legitimacy, or higher-level support.

In Thompson's view, closed-system aspects of organizations come into play most clearly at the technical level, while open-system aspects are most evident at the institutional level. One of his major propositions is that an organization operating under norms of rationality seeks to seal off its "technical core" from environmental influences.

However, since organizational rationality depends on input and output activities (for instance, input of resources and output of finished products into a market), and since inputs and outputs depend on the environment, technology can never be completely insulated from environmental forces. This leads to Thompson's subsequent propositions that an organization seeks to "buffer" the technical core from environmental influences on both input and output sides, to "smooth" or minimize fluctuations in input and output transactions, and to anticipate and adapt to environmental changes which cannot be buffered or smoothed. If

the organization cannot protect its technical core through these strategies, it resorts to "rationing," or determination of priorities with respect to interactions with the environment.

Thompson defines the organization's boundaries in terms of what he calls organizational "domain." The domain describes at what points the organization interacts with the environment, or in other words, how far its boundaries extend. An organization's claim to a domain depends partly on consensus about the organization's role among both members and non-members with whom they interact.

Thompson also uses the narrower concept of "task environment," which refers to those parts of the environment that are most relevant to the organization. Citing Dill (1958), Thompson enumerates these as (a)customers, (b)suppliers of resources, (c)competitors for both markets and resources, and (d)regulators, including government agencies.

The organization's handling of inputs and outputs hinges largely on two more important concepts--power and dependency. An organization has varying degress of power or dependency relative to different elements of its task environment. Following Emerson (1962), Thompson says that the organization is dependent (a)in proportion to its need for a particular resource, and (b)in inverse proportion to the existence of alternative sources of that resource. The organization has power to the extent that (a)it has capacity to satisfy needs existing in the environment, and (b)it monopolizes this capacity.

IV. THE MODEL APPLIED TO THE NEWSPAPER

This section applies main features of Thompson's model to the U.S. newspaper organization. The discussion is theoretical, and the subject is an idealized "typical" newspaper. Further

empirical study of newspapers of various locations, sizes, and ownerships would be necessary to determine how generalizable the model actually is.

As a preliminary, we need a definition of the newspaper organization. Conceivably, we could take the newspaper chain, or the multi-media company that owns the chain, or the diversified conglomerate that owns the company, as the unit of analysis. This analysis focuses on the individual newspaper, since regardless of ownership, newspapers remain a peculiarly local institution in this country. Nonetheless, for the paper that belongs to a larger firm, the model itself impels us to consider the corporate context at least as an environmental force.

Thompson's central proposition, that organizations are open systems operating under norms of rationality, is a logical departure point for research on newspapers.

The newspaper is a quintessentially open system, interacting with its environment in political, economic, cultural and other arenas. This open-system character is clearest in its dual identity as both public service and business. The newspaper has a well-accepted and legally-protected function in our political system as a purveyor of news and information in the public interest. Simultaneously, as a private enterprise, it strives to make money by both selling itself to an audience and selling its audience to advertisers.

At the same time, to survive and prosper economically, as well as to maintain social legitimacy, it strives to rationalize internal activities and to minimize external uncertainties. The goals and strategies of this open system are based largely on rational systems assumptions.

Thompson's emphasis on the role of rationality and certainty in efforts to seal off the organization's technical core is a particularly intriguing and complex question in the case of the newspaper. The newspaper has at least four different technical sectors, corresponding to its journalistic, advertising, production, and distribution activities, and these sectors employ diverse types of technologies.

Thompson describes three different types of organizational technology--long-linked, whose prototype is the manufacturing assembly line; mediating, which serves the primary function of linking interdependent clients or customers; and intensive, or custom technology aimed at transforming some object in which selection, combination, and order of application is determined by "feedback" from the object itself.

A newspaper employs all of these. The newsgathering process depends on intensive technology; reporters transform data about events or issues defined as newsworthy into news stories for publication, depending in part on the nature of the subject matter to guide their application of journalistic technique. Advertising and circulation have mediating functions--to link advertisers with consumers, as well as to convey information to citizens. And the production of the physical product itself depends on long-linked manufacturing processes.

Thompson postulates that differences in technology account for variability among organizations. In the case of the newspaper, the diverse technologies found within the organization itself account for variability among the organization's parts. Depending on technological mode, different departments will use different strategies and attain varying degrees of success in

sealing off technical cores from the environment, as well as in insulating technical cores from the effects of internal interdependency.

As with organizations generally under Thompson's model, access to resources and the flow of these resources through the organizational system are key aspect of the newspaper's interrelationships with its environment. The newspaper requires a broad array of resource inputs: The news department needs "newsworthy" information, the advertising department needs business accounts and classified customers, circulation depends on a delivery fleet, production requires newsprint and ink, all departments need qualified employees, etc. The main output is short-lived editorial and commercial information in the form of a physical product that is distributed among readers on a daily basis.

The newspaper's task environment can be described in terms of these inputs and outputs. The relevant elements of the environment include sources of information such as public officials, news agencies, and syndicates; as well as newsprint manufacturers, readers, advertisers, and competing media outlets. If the paper belongs to a chain or conglomerate, as is likely in this day and age, the parent company itself may provide for many of these elements through vertical integration--for instance, the company may own a paper mill, a news service, or other media outlets in the same locality.

A fruitful area for newspaper research would be a study of "buffering" structures and strategies for the various departments of the newspaper. Thompson suggests that the more sophisticated the technology, and the less clear the relationship between technical means and desired ends, the more difficult it becomes

to buffer the technical core. One could describe how means-ends relationships diminish in clarity as one moves through the various technologies of the newspaper: They are clearest for the production department, which uses manufacturing technology designed to get out the physical product; less clear for advertising and circulation, which rely on sales and transport to build and maintain large and loyal clienteles; and least clear for the news department, which uses craft or professional techniques to transform the unstable raw material of daily events into something called "news." Correspondingly, one would expect that the production department is best able to insulate its technology from the environment, the news department least able to. One could illustrate this by studying how the different departments are geared to deal with environmental contingencies--for instance, how much technological adaptation is required to deal with unexpected news events.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION AND CHANGE

Thompson's model has rich implications for analyzing organizational adaptation and change. In the case of the newspaper industry, it provides a way of looking at economic reordering in the newspaper industry produced by mergers and acquisitions, and of identifying and predicting the impact of this development on organizational structure and behavior.

Current trends in media economics suggest that newspapers, while remaining open systems, are becoming increasingly subject to norms of rationality. The buying and selling of newspapers has brought to the fore the "business" side, with its express goal of profitability, as opposed to the "journalistic" side, which claims the more ambiguous goal of serving the public

interest. In the words of Advertising Age (Jan. 26, 1987, p. S1): "For better or worse, the era of the corporate press has arrived."

Concern that free enterprise and the free flow of information might not always be compatible goes back to the Hutchins Commission's study (1947) of growing concentration of newspaper ownership. In the past two decades, worries about newspaper chains and one-paper towns have evolved into alarm over the scope and implications of media conglomeration (Mintz and Cohen, 1971; Bagdikian, 1971, 1972, 1983; Barron, 1973). Today's largest media chains and conglomerates are multi-billion-dollar enterprises ranking among the Fortune 500. The buying and selling of media properties reached such proportions in the mid-1980s that Advertising Age (June 27, 1985) described it as "acquisition fever;" and earlier this year, after the Time-Warner marriage was announced, Advertising Age (March 20, 1989) heralded the dawn of another wave of media consolidations (1).

Little systematic research exists on efforts to rationalize work and management after media organizations change hands (Tillinghast, 1981). However, Blankenburg's studies of Gannett (1982, 1983) provide good examples of rationality at work in the news organization under large chain ownership. The evidence suggests that papers under such ownership systematically constrain circulation in an effort to achieve optimum (rather than maximum) penetration; and that these papers' access to the resources of the parent corporation enables them to charge above-average prices for retail advertising, so that even in competitive situations they command the type of market power typically associated with monopolies. Blankenburg also examines

economic rationality in his study of two-newspaper firms (1985), predicting company consolidations on the basis of size, trends, and ratios of circulation of sister papers.

Studies in industries other than media have shown that corporate mergers and acquisitions are often followed by organizational restructuring, importation of new management, increased performance pressure, increased reporting requirements, personnel changes and other attempts to assert control (Walter, 1985). Such developments express what Thompson identifies as the key to organizational dynamics--the drive common to all organizations to minimize uncertainty. The work of Blankenburg cited above indicates that multiple-paper ownership accentuates this drive, but more work needs to be done in this area.

Thompson distinguishes three types of uncertainty: First, and most fundamental, is "generalized uncertainty" about the organization's purpose in society at large. Second, the organization must deal with uncertainties in the task environment, often with respect to inputs and outputs. Third, it faces uncertainties stemming from internal interdependencies. One would expect strategies to cope with all three types of uncertainty to proliferate and intensify in a period of change.

The first and broadest type of uncertainty relates to an organization's role and claim to legitimacy in the larger social system. In the case of the newspaper, different members of the organization are likely to have divergent definitions of the newspaper's mission; and these divergent views will be reflected among different sectors of the society at large. For instance, journalists and academics emphasize "watchdog" and information functions, which may parallel the concerns of civic groups and of readers in their role as citizens; advertising managers and

salespeople emphasize the commercial function of supplying commmodity information and fueling the engines of the economy, corresponding to the interests of advertisers as well as meeting needs of readers in their consumer role; and members of the board of directors are concerned with quarterly earnings, as are stockholders.

Thompson suggests that organizations confronted with generalized uncertainty tend to stress ceremonial affirmations of their importance. This may help explain why, in response to ambiguity about the profit-seeking versus information-disseminating roles of the press, newspaper chains such as Gannett and Times Mirror frequently take out full-page ads in journalism reviews and the general press to advertise their commitment to First Amendment values. Simultaneously, however, individual newspapers are promoting a new cultural understanding of themselves as commodities through their packaging and promotion (Advertising Age, Jan. 26, 1986). In the future, researchers interested in media-society relationships might focus on newspapers' own public relations operations to study how newspapers present themselves to different social sectors--or in Thompson's terms, how newspapers attempt to deal with generalized uncertainty about the role and meaning of the press in a time of rapid change.

Thompson says that the main way an organization attempts to reduce the second type of uncertainty, that derived from its task environment, is through regulation of transactions at its boundaries. This may involve maneuvering and compromise with elements of the task environment. Examples include formal and informal contracting, and cooptation of critics into leadership. Or the organization may attempt to move its boundaries to

encompass unreliable elements. Examples of this include vertical integration, horizontal expansion, and diversification. Thompson describes these as methods of achieving control over "crucial contingencies," such as ensuring access to resources or broadening clientele. We can also characterize them as efforts to maximize power and minimize dependency.

Such strategies are evident in trends that have emerged in the newspaper industry over the past two decades. Many mergers and acquisitions can be interpreted as boundary-expanding moves designed to ensure access to broader readership, a larger advertising base, and other resources. Perhaps the starkest example of a strategy to reduce uncertainty posed by rivals is the joint operating agreement, the arrangement approved by Congress in 1970 to circumvent antitrust laws that allows competing newspapers in the same locality to merge advertising, circulation and production operations while maintaining separate news staffs. At the level of the individual newspaper, moves such as co-opting critics by putting them onto editorial advisory boards, phasing out paper routes for schoolchildren in favor of adult carriers, and undercutting other advertising media are examples of efforts by news, circulation, and advertising departments to reduce environmental uncertainty.

Thompson identifies deployment of "boundary-spanning" positions and units as a common mechanism for reducing environmental uncertainty. One example of a newspaper boundary-spanner is the institution of "ombudsman," which has arisen to handle complaints from the public and serve as in-house critic. A more complex boundary-spanning unit is the market research department, a relatively recent addition to the newspaper organization. Increasingly, audience surveys provide

the basis for decisions affecting the news product, such as zoning of editions and modification of editorial emphasis to appeal to targeted reader groups. As norms of rationality tighten, numbers and types of boundary-spanners should proliferate. Inventory and analysis of the emergence and deployment of various types of newspaper boundary-spanners would be a fruitful line of research.

Thompson says that the organization seeks to reduce internally-derived uncertainty chiefly through coordination among its interdependent parts. Coordination schemes are simplest in stable situations, and increase in complexity with instability and unpredictability. An organization will try to group positions and cluster the groups into units and departments so as to minimize coordination difficulties and costs.

Newspapers for the most part operate in volatile and interdependent contexts. The newsgathering sector, for instance, faces the problem of generating a daily supply of news stories that presumably are idosyncratic and unpredictable. Tuchman (1978) and others have described the routines and patterns journalists follow to ensure this supply. The business departments depend on the news department to provide the meat, so to speak, of the product; and the news department in turn is dependent on the business departments for revenue to support the newsgathering. Each department has its own dependencies on environmental elements that may affect other departments through interdependencies. For instance, the advertising sector is vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy affecting advertising budgets; and a paper with fewer ads will be smaller, thus leaving less room for news.

Thompson notes that an organization's interdependent parts may interact in any of three ways: Pooled interdependence means that parts do not interact with each other, but the operation of the whole depends on adequate functioning of each of them. Sequential interdependence takes serial form, with one part making contributions to another. Reciprocal interdependence means units are interrelated, with outputs of one being inputs for another, and vice versa.

The newspaper might seem to exhibit mainly sequential interdependence--for instance, the provision of both news content and advertisements are prerequisites for production, which precedes distribution. But most relationships actually are reciprocal--for instance, news content and advertising help attract (or repel) readers and thus have a part in determining circulation, but circulation figures are what attract advertisers, and circulation figures determine how many papers get printed; and while journalists claim the prerogative to define news within the news department, audience characteristics gleaned through reader surveys run by the advertising department may help shape priorities in the news columns.

The three types of interdependence imply corresponding methods of coordination, characterized by increasing complexity and costliness: Standardization, which involves establishment of rules or routines, may be applied to stable and repetitive situations. Cordination by plan involves establishment of schedules to govern actions of interdependent units, and is more appropriate in dynamic situations. Coordination by mutual adjustment involves transmission of new information, and is suited to variable or unpredictable situations. In the case of

the newspaper, where reciprocal interdependence is pervasive and so many tasks are variable, much coordination will be of this last form, the most costly and complex.

If, as this paper contends, the newspaper industry is increasingly inclined to pursue rational norms, then we should expect to see structural adjustment within the newspaper to facilitate coordination among interdependent parts. Udell (1978), in his discussion of newspaper economics, gives an indication of the kinds of changes corporate rationality has wrought. He describes the structure of the typical newspaper of the past as self-contained and pyramidical, whereas the modern newspaper is structured in concentric circles. The latter arrangement both acknowledges and allows for smoother coordination of interdependencies. Some of Thompson's ideas about organizational dynamics and change could be tested through empirical study applying Udell's configurations to actual newspaper structure, and examining restructuring in times of change.

As of 1987, chains accounted for 77 percent of daily newspaper circulation and 71 percent of the total number of daily newspapers in the U.S. (Advertising Age, Jan. 26, 1987, p. S1). Researchers also should look at the exceptions to the general rule of chain ownership, particularly those papers that are actively bucking consolidation trends (Advertising Age, Jan. 26, 1987, p. S22). It would be useful to compare how the exigencies of rationality are expressed in newspapers with independent owners who have resisted purchase or have repurchased their papers from chains, versus newspapers owned by chains. How might methods and content of claims to legitimacy, boundary spanning activities, and internal coordination schemes differ between

independent and chain papers? Is there evidence of an "organizational learning" process (March and Levitt, 1988) in which independents under pressure adopt chain competitors' strategies to gain more control over their environments?

VI. CONCLUSION

Research on mass media organizations and occupations can benefit greatly by drawing on concepts and theories developed for studying other types of enterprises. However, concepts and theories cannot be borrowed indiscriminately. Closed, rational-systems models are inappropriate to an institution with a socio-political status--be it actual or ascribed--as prominent as that of the press. But purely open, natural-system models fail to capture the purposive economic aspects of newspaper production. A model such as Thompson's, which directs our attention to the tensions between the norms of rationality and the realities of openness, seems best suited to the structure and dynamics of the modern newspaper.

In dealing mainly with the newspaper's organizational structure, interaction with the environment, and internal interdependencies, this discussion has left many important questions unaddressed. Application of Thompson's model need not be restricted to organizational and institutional levels; its richness and logic can inform research on individual attitudes, occupational dynamics, or the newspaper product itself. For instance, one might study how the combination of open-systems realities and rational-systems goals finds expression in newspaper design and content; how technical innovations which have transformed the newspaper production process affect

hierarchies and routines in the newsroom; or whether journalists face new exigencies of rationality after ownership changes and, if so, how they experience and cope with role strain.

Most communication researchers today would probably agree that the search for an overarching "theory of communication" is futile. Instead, we search for mid-range theories and models that embrace a limited set of phenomena. We seldom find even these. But we should make best use of ones others have found already. Thompson's model is a case in point, offering a kind of theoretical connective tissue for research on several levels into differing types of questions concerning the people and organizations that produce the news.

NOTES

(1) From mid-1983 to mid-1985, the country's 100 largest media companies were involved in 48 broadcast purchases involving 207 tv, radio and cable properties, and 32 print purchases involving 176 properties (Advertising Age, June 27, 1985). The years 1985-86 saw the largest media acquisition in history, Capital Cities Communications' $3.5 billion purchase of ABC (Rothmeyer, 1985); as well as the purchase by Gannett Co., which ranks first among the country's media corporations in terms of number of newspapers and newspaper revenues, of three prize newspaper properties for a combined total of some $1.2 billion--an achievement Gannett's chairman likened to "winning the Triple Crown" (New York Times, May 20, 1986). While the announcement of the planned Time Inc.- Warner Communications merger in March did not involve newspapers, it fed predictions that major newspaper powers such as Gannett Co., Tribune Co., and Knight-Ridder would be forced to link up in order to survive (Advertising Age, March 20, 1989).

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